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ONTARIO

Department of Education

Training The Voices of Children and Adolescents

Issued by Authority of
The Minister of Education

Introduction

The training of children in Voice Production is one of the most responsible and one of the most difficult of the music teacher's tasks. Untold harm may be done by lack of method, or by a faulty method. The law of habit works with unerring severity and secures a deadening grip upon the child who daily practises harsh and unmusical tone production. He develops vocal habits that impair and make unlovely his singing voice, and kill or stunt his sense of the beautiful in music. Daily singing by children of impressionable age is bound to be either helpful or harmful. There is no middle course. Most of the children enter school without singing habits of any sort. At the end of the second year they are well started either on the upward or downward road. Their direction depends on whether their ideals and practice have developed good or bad habits. It takes many times as long to correct a bad habit as it does to form a good one.

This pamphlet is prepared in an effort to help teachers by suggesting methods and devices likely to secure desirable results. It is purposely made as simple and direct as possible. Alert teachers will discover ways of varying and augmenting the devices suggested herein.

I.

The Child Voice

FIRST STEPS

Music is a tone language, therefore the ability to think and "speak" it must be obtained through the ear. The first step is to train the ear to recognize and the voice to produce a given musical tone, to "match tones" as it is commonly called. Varied and elaborate devices are unnecessary and unwise. The following is suggested:

Have the class sing a familiar song, such as "God Save the King" or "Jesus Loves Me". If no songs are known, have the class "play engine", by singing "too, too, too" on C (third space, treble staff), sustaining the last tone. Walk up and down the aisles, listening carefully to each child. Divide the class into two groups, (a) those who can sing correctly, and (b) those who have difficulty in matching tones. Call them First and Second Choir, Fairies and Brownies, or Canaries and Blackbirds. The children may suggest other names. Seat group (a) towards the back of the room, and group (b) at the front where they can hear the better singers and where they can be most easily given individual attention. A little later on, it will be advisable to have three groups, the middle group, called Elves or Red Birds, being those who can match a few tones, but are uncertain when singing songs. This seating plan should be used for every music lesson, the children quickly learning to find their places without confusion or loss of time.

The principal cause of harsh and unmusical tone in the early grades is the practice of allowing children to sing in a low compass, thus encouraging the use of the thick, "chest" voice. Songs should be short and in the proper keys, and teachers should always use a pitchpipe or other reliable means of finding the correct keynote. Never guess at the pitch, and do not habitually sing or play with the class. The use of breathing exercises and formal tone drills usually does more harm than good at this stage. Correct posture and bright but quiet singing of suitable songs is all that is necessary.

MONOTONES

The child who cannot sing in tune requires special attention. If he cannot sing, he is deprived of all active participation in the music work of the group. If he lags behind, he loses interest and becomes a drawback to the rest of the group. So, from the very beginning, the immediate task is to teach every child to sing. It is a comparatively simple task to train the voice of a young child; it becomes a difficult problem when applied to the youth or the adult. It is a serious mistake to allow monotones to attempt to sing with the class. Such attempts only arrest progress, for the sound of his own voice prevents the child from hearing the correct tones, and the tone quality of the whole class suffers thereby. Continued "singing off pitch" dulls rather than sharpens the sense of pitch and makes more difficult the training of ear and voice. Great care must be exercised, however, not to discourage these children or hurt their feelings. While the term 'monotone' or 'listener' has been generally used to classify these children, it is much better to call them "Bluebirds", or some similar name. It is a very serious matter to cause a child to believe that he cannot learn to sing.

Inability to sing on pitch may be due to one or more of the following reasons:

1. No musical background.
2. Poor concentration.
3. Poor coordination.
4. Speech difficulties.
5. Neurotic conditions.
6. Diseased nose, throat or ears.

Besides the foregoing, there may be other reasons for pitch inaccuracy but whatsoever the cause, great patience and tact should be used in a thoughtful study of the child and in meeting his musical needs. If conditions indicate a physical disability, have pupils examined by a physician. In most instances the cause can be remedied because there are very few children in whom the ability to sing more or less accurately on pitch cannot be developed.

Monotones should receive individual attention daily; in fact, two or three very short periods each day are more beneficial than longer periods at less frequent intervals. Be sure that the child is concentrating. Make him look at you by saying, "Let me see the color of your eyes". Touching the top of his head with one finger will often give him the idea of 'singing high'. Include the rest of the class as soon as possible. Ask the Canaries to sing the pitch while the Bluebirds individually match the tone. Ask individual Canaries to help individual Bluebirds, standing or sitting beside their 'pupils' and singing the tone directly into their ears. A few of the best singers may take turns playing teacher. This is particularly useful for men teachers. The entire class should be led to feel that changing Bluebird into a Canary is an important activity and a happy one.

The following sequence of devices is suggested:

FIRST STEP (a) Start with one tone, not wide skips. Try C (third space, treble staff). If the child cannot reach this tone, find his pitch and work upwards from that. Have him sing this tone and sustain it. While the first child continues to sustain the tone, each one of the group is asked individually to sing the same tone and hold it. The neutral syllable of "loo" seems to work best here because the child automatically assumes a correct position for producing a tone most easily.. Each child is told that before he runs out of breath he should take another and keep on singing.

(b) "Let's be a Snow-White dwarf, and laugh as they do — "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

(b) "Let's be a Hallowe'en Owl — "Hoo, Hoo, Hoo."

(d) "Let's ring the telephone — 'Ng ---- ' " (for nasal resonance).

(e) "Show me how the smoke curls up from the bon-fire — 'Hum'." (teeth gently on lower lip)

SECOND STEP (using two tones, but not words — consonants increase the difficulty).

(a) "Call to me like this — Hoo, Hoo." (soh - me)

The idea of calling from a distance helps to lift the tone into the head.

(b) "Let's tell the time by the cuckoo clock — 'Cuckoo, Cuckoo'. What time is it?" (Game)

THIRD STEP (three tones — soh - me - doh — using words). "Hear Me Sing", "Bow - wow - wow", "Cook - a doodle - doo", etc. It will usually be found that descending passages are at first easier to sing than ascending ones.

FOURTH STEP. A very short song which is easily divided into tiny phrases (still individually).

FIFTH STEP. Child now enters the 'Middle Group'. This choir comes up for matching tones *as a group*. Children often match tones individually, but still need practice in ensemble singing. When the second choir can sing an entire short song satisfactorily, they join the 'first group' amid great rejoicing and handing out of stars!

Other devices sometimes found effective are:

1. Have the children place their hands on their stomachs, just below the lower ribs, and 'lift' the tone. While the interest created by this activity is the chief value, the physical effort also helps.
2. Draw a ladder on the blackboard, and as the teacher moves her pointer up the rungs of the ladder, have pupils follow the movement with an increasing rise in the tone of his voice.

If monotones, other than changing voices, are present in higher grades, it is not advisable to use such devices as are suggested above. Without asking them to sing alone, encourage them to listen and imitate, and to participate so far as is possible in the music lesson. If music is properly taught during the first two years of school there should be few if any monotones in the higher grades.

TRAINING THE VOICE

The tone produced by a child of five or six is extremely small, having very little volume. Under no circumstances should the child be encouraged to sing loudly. The moment the voice is forced, the quality is ruined, because the child must then produce a thick, heavy tone, thereby pinching the throat, stiffening the jaw, and beginning the formation of vocal habits which are harmful in the extreme. The correct tone, while very small and light when the child is small, grows and develops as the child grows. It is mellow and musical and is produced without effort, causing no fatigue or ill effects of any sort.

The quality of tone produced by the teacher is sure to be imitated by the children. Hence it is highly important that the teacher shall use a light, mellow head tone whenever she sings for the children. Every woman who can sing at all can learn to produce such a tone, the contralto as well as the soprano. Children will imitate the quality and volume quite as much as the pitch and length of tone. The teacher should not sing with the children, as this discourages independence, encourages a heavy tone, and prevents the discovery of errors. The teacher's ear must become very sensitive to tone quality. She may sing for the children. While she sings, the children should listen, and while they sing, it is of equal importance that the teacher should listen. Men seem to have more difficulty in using a soft, light tone quality than do women, but it is quite possible for them to develop a 'half voice' which makes a suitable pattern, and is not fatiguing in any way. There should be a feeling of looseness in the face and throat and no attempt to apply bodily power to the tone. Children soon learn to imitate a man's voice, singing an octave higher than they hear it, but they fail to develop the proper tone quality if the man uses his full singing voice.

While the nature of Kindergarten procedure makes it impossible to carry out in full the suggestions offered in this pamphlet, Kindergarten teachers could help greatly by, towards Spring, preparing the class as follows: Abandon the use of the piano for songs, stop singing with the children, substitute shorter and simpler songs, and have daily individual work with the non-singers.

It is desirable that children be told very little about the organs which function in the process of singing, such information tending to self-consciousness and misunderstanding, but it is essential that the teacher should have a very clear idea about what happens. It is only the teacher who knows the technique of his art thoroughly who is able to present it to a class of children in the simplest, clearest and quickest way. Even the best methods of training the adult voice cannot safely be applied to the training of the child voice.

In training the voices of children, the most important points are (a) Correct method of breathing, (b) Proper tone production, (c) Diction, or the correct use of Vowel and Consonant sounds.

BREATHING

Correct posture is the first consideration. When standing, the body should be relaxed but not lounging, with chest up, head up, but chin in. Hands should hang loosely at the sides, or be clasped easily in front, but not behind the back, as this has a tendency to restrict the chest muscles. Asking the child to 'stand like a big, fat man' will usually get the desired result. When sitting, the back should be erect and the feet flat on the floor. The suggestion, 'Sit up tall', should be all the instruction necessary.

Correct breathing and perfect control over the breath are of vital importance. Breathing for singing is a simple matter. It differs in one main point from ordinary breathing, namely, that in singing, breath is emitted slowly. The most difficult thing to get children to do without tension, is to inhale quickly. It is, however, imperative that it should be done, as this is by far the most frequently used way of taking in the breath during singing. All quick inhalations should be through the mouth. There should be no sound of breathing, and the throat should feel big and loose. The expansion should be all around the waistline, without protrusion of the abdomen or raising of the shoulders. Where breath is taken in slowly, as at the beginning of a song, or during an interlude, it should be taken in through the nostrils. It is not advisable to hold the breath. This may increase capacity, but, unless most carefully done, it tends to rigidity and strain, and is not a 'singing position'.

The practice of singing will develop breath control better than any set exercises, the tone itself acting as a point of focus and control for the entire singing mechanism. It also stimulates the interest of the class, which is much to be desired. Until such time, however, as correct breathing habits are firmly established, it is wise to have the singing period start with one or two short, simple exercises. A few minutes used regularly and frequently are to be much preferred to long set lessons in breathing. The following are suggested:

1. See that the room is well ventilated.
2. Class stand. Place hands above the lower ribs and feel them expand outwards as children inhale slowly, with closed lips, through the nose. Let them imagine they are quietly smelling the scent of a flower. Exhale slowly, through the mouth, as if they are gently blowing the petals away. Vary the exercise by having them breathe out to the contented sound of "ah".
3. Inhale quickly through the mouth, like a yawn or a gasp of surprise, without making any sound, feeling the throat big and loose, and without raising the shoulders. Exhale slowly through the mouth as in No. 2. Vary the exercise by having them breathe out while they count softly, or sing a sustained tone in the middle of their compass rather quietly. An effective way of preventing waste of breath in exhaling is to tell the children to 'pull the tone in', or 'drink in the tone'.
4. Take a simple folk song or hymn tune, sing a phrase in one breath, then work gradually until two or more phrases can be sung in one breath. This is for practice only; it is not intended that in performance two or more phrases must be sung in one breath.

TONE PRODUCTION

The young child's voice is a small one, and neither needs nor merits stereotyped lessons in 'production'. The teacher should use her voice as a child is to use his. Don't try to get 'adult' tone from children. A child trying to sing like an adult may ruin his natural voice, possibly for life. All voice production for children should be voice-preservation. The greater part of all class singing should be subdued and quiet; loud tone can always be built up if quiet tone is properly

produced, but the converse is not the case. At no time should the tone be devitalized or lacking in interest. One frequently hears school children using a strong chest tone while repeating the multiplication tables or in the spelling lesson. This is obviously most damaging to the child's vocal organs.

The safe range of the young child's voice is within the limits of the treble staff. This remains the case until the approach of adolescence, except that, under proper guidance, there is a slight increase in range both up and down, from about Grade Four on. The upper half of the child voice is the better part, and teachers should remember that all normal children are soprano, and that the child voice is higher than the average adult voice. Do not lower the pitch of songs.

When the human voice produces full low tones, resonance is obtained largely from the chest cavities. In the case of high tones resonance comes principally from the head cavities. In an untrained voice, there is a decided break between the "chest" tones and the "head" tones. One of the chief objects of voice training is to bridge the gap between the two qualities. If the "chest" quality is carried up, the result is a coarse, pinched, or shouting tone which will not blend, but will usually flatten in pitch and tend to unnatural diction.

By extending the "head" voice downward, the so-called "break" is avoided, and all tendency to force and strain the voice and throat is avoided.

The following practical suggestions should be helpful to teachers.

1. Insist upon the same quality of tone in all music activities. Sight singing and Modulator or Rhythm drills are as much music as songs.
2. Sing songs in proper keys. Remember that the safe part of the child's voice lies within the limits of the staff; that the best part is the upper half; and that descending phrases are easier to sing properly than ascending ones.
3. Top tones should be clear and ringing; low tones without volume. Tell the children to get their 'noses over the top tones', not to 'hang on by their chins'. They should feel that their voices are on a level with the top tone.
4. Apathy and inertia affect tone. Keep the class interested. Develop an increasing interest in, and a critical attitude towards tone.
5. There must be a feeling of looseness about the lower part of the face and throat during all singing. The teeth must be apart, and the muscles of the tongue, lips and face flexible and soft. The mouth must be opened easily and naturally. An unnatural or distorted expression of the face while singing is conclusive evidence of bad tonal conditions. A stiff, forced condition of the open mouth may be quite as bad as the closed teeth. One of the worst and most common errors is the neglect to open the back part of the throat and mouth. The lips and teeth may be wide open while the tongue and soft palate completely close the throat. No direct appeal should ever be made to the child to 'open the throat'. It is more effective to simply have them 'loosen, relax, and smile'.
6. Voice exercises should not be given on upward scales until the 'head' voice has been established.
7. Humming of songs and exercises is good practice as it tends towards a 'head' tone and away from rigidity.
8. Aim for quiet beauty of tone, steadily floating out on the breath. Lift the voice (not press or force). Pull the tone in.
9. Attack always on the tone, never slide up to it. Think the tone, then sing it.

Good tone can be developed entirely through songs, if sufficient care is taken in their choice and treatment. It is not wise to submit children to elaborate, formal

exercises, but the use of sequential studies is recommended in that they serve a threefold purpose, encouraging the use of the head voice, drilling on most of the vowels and consonants, and giving automatic use of syllables as a preparation for sight singing. Children learn them quickly, as their sequential nature is obvious, once the teacher has given the pattern.

Study No. 1. d'td/d'tltd/d'tsltd'/d'tlsfsltd'/etc.

Study No. 2. d'tl/tls/lst/sfm/fmr/mrd/rdt/d

Study No. 3. d'l/ts/lf/sm/fr/md/rt/d

Study No. 4. d'/td'/ld'/sd'/fd'/md'/rd'/dd'

Start on D (fourth line) later changing to E flat, then E. Pointing to the modulator or indicating the direction by a movement of the hand will help at first. Vary the procedure by using the following sounds in place of syllables.

1. Hum on 'M' with closed lips to bring the voice into the head.
2. Hum on 'N' with open lips and tip of tongue touching the back of the lower teeth to develop resonance.
3. "oo" (as in hoot). Lips well rounded as in drinking from a very small glass. The habitual use of 'oo' is apt to develop a 'Hooty' tone. Don't overdo it.
4. 'O' (as in on). This vowel is favourable to a good tone. This sound is like 'a' in father.
5. Use the vowels in (3) and (4) but place consonants before them —
t, b, d, to give clean attack,
l, m, n, to get correct head tone and extra resonance.
6. Vocalize various songs, phrase by phrase, using the vowel sounds in (3), (4) and (5).

When correct vocal habits have been established, sequential studies may be sung in reverse order, starting at the bottom. Remember always that low tones should be light in quality.

DICTION

The term Diction in music includes pronunciation, enunciation and articulation. Good tone and good diction go together, one helping the other. We sing on vowels and punctuate with consonants. The vowel sound must be pure and the consonants crisp and clean-cut. Any attempt to sing on consonants will spoil the smooth legato tone. Use the initial consonant to get a clean attack and the final consonant to cut off the vowel sound. Trying to vocalize such final consonants as b, c, d, g, k, p and t cuts off the tone entirely and results in a disjointed, staccato effect. Singing on the final consonants l, m, and n, while possible, is inartistic and should not be practised except for some special effect. The final consonant r is the worst offender. Children in some parts of this Province habitually sing on "r" with their tongues curled and stiff. Not only is the sound crude, but such practice tends to rigidity in the throat and impairment of tone. Care should be taken to sing on the vowel sound only, and to use the "r" as a consonant for punctuation.

It is not possible to discuss all the vowel sounds at length, but the following hints may be helpful. Let the tongue lie loosely horizontal and flat in the bottom of the mouth, keeping the tip just touching the back of the lower teeth. When saying "ah", (father) the teeth should not be more than half an inch apart. The mouth is opened by merely the dropping of the back of the lower jaw. When singing "ee" (see) or "a" (hay) try to keep the mouth open lengthwise rather

than sideways. Make the tone "North and South", not "East and West". When singing "oo" (hoot) or "o" (so) pout the lips. Try to make the lips and the tip of the nose meet. Diphthongs need special care. Do not divide the vowel sounds, but give all the time to the more important one. In such words as night (ah-ee) and hay (a-ee) sing on the first vowel sound and quickly pass over the second. In such words as you (ee-oo) quickly pass over the first vowel and sing on the second.

In developing good diction with children, do not attempt to discuss the physiological aspect of the production of sound. Children naturally imitate, and the teacher will find that example is better than precept. Diction can best be dealt with through actual songs.

MAINTAINING PITCH

Probably the commonest fault in the singing of children is failure to maintain the pitch, or 'flatting'. There is no reason why the pitch should fall, if the suggestions in this pamphlet are carefully followed. The usual causes are some combination of the following:

1. Poor ventilation. The remedy is obvious.
2. Forcing up the "chest" voice. Raising the pitch of the song will often induce a "headier" tone.
3. Poor position. Already discussed.
4. Insufficiency of breath, especially at the end of long phrases. This is usually caused by singing songs too slowly.
5. Carelessness, apathy or inertia. Increase interest in the lesson, making the children feel bright, happy and comfortable.
6. Physical fatigue. A smile is the most effective way to loosen the face muscles.
7. Inaccurate conception. Singing intervals incorrectly until the ear no longer notices the difference. The frequent use of a pitchpipe or other instrument to check the pitch will correct this.
8. Commencing a song or exercise before the given key-note or doh has been properly fixed in the memory. Have the class repeat doh and the first tone until all are in agreement.

II.

The Adolescent Voice GIRLS

The fact that boys' voices change during adolescence is generally accepted. That girls' voices also change is not so generally realized. If, as mentioned previously, the child voice is normally soprano, and if, as we all know, the mature woman's voice ranges from high soprano to low contralto, it is obvious that a change must take place. The girl's voice, during the changing period, loses temporarily some of its freshness, and songs should be of more limited range, avoiding particularly the very high tones. Girls at this time should be encouraged to sing easily, with a light, floating quality, and in part singing should be assigned to that part most suitable to their vocal range.

BOYS

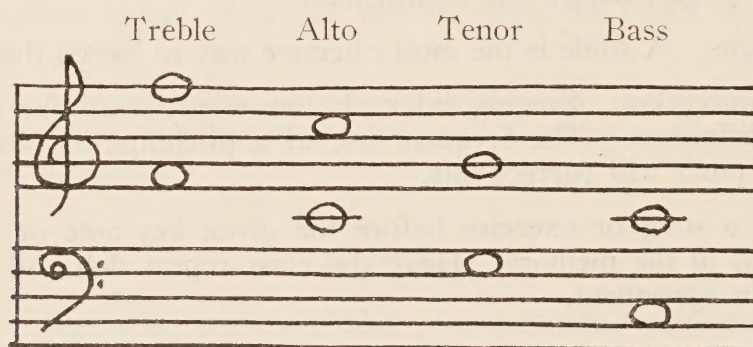
During adolescence the boy's voice deepens in pitch and quality, due to the rapid growth of his vocal cords. The voice "changes" but does not "break",

unless a great strain is placed upon it. Boys do not cease to speak during adolescence, and except in rare cases, need not cease to sing. Lessons on musical literature with the aid of a phonograph provide valuable training for adolescent youths, but they should never be a substitute for singing. It is imperative, however, that boys' voices be properly classified, that they sing within their easy range, and that the tone be not forced. While unison songs may be still used, provided they are transposed to suit the compass of the voices, teachers are urged to develop part singing. In this way only will the boys feel that they have an important place in the singing period. Fortunately, song material is now available which is suitable both in vocal arrangement and text.

The generally accepted theory is that, if properly produced, the boy's voice gradually descends. He loses his top tones and adds new ones at the bottom, passing through the approximate range of Alto, Tenor and Bass before definitely settling into his man's voice. While these terms are used, it must not be supposed that they mean quite the same as mature tenor or bass. The adolescent voice lacks volume and resonance and should never be forced. When carefully handled it can be quite beautiful and teachers are cautioned not to allow boys or girls to abuse their voices at this critical period.

Following is a suggested plan for the classification of boys' voices:

Starting in Grade VII and after that, at regular intervals, boys who appear to be growing up should be tested individually by singing a descending scale from G (second line, treble staff). This should be done privately or with the group of boys alone, as they are likely to be timid in the presence of the girls. If the voice is full and free in the lower part of the scale, it usually indicates that the change has begun, and the boy should be taken from the soprano section and assigned to whichever of the following parts is best suited to his easy range.



It is not uncommon to find a boy who retains his brilliant top soprano tones after his speaking voice has begun to descend, but it is generally not in his best interest to encourage him to use these, as sooner or later a definite break may occur. Voices should be reclassified at the beginning of each term, and the boy should be told that if at any time he has any difficulty with his voice he must report at once, so that he may again be tested and placed in the proper section.

With the above system of classification, school groups will consist of several or all of the following: Girl Sopranos, Girl Contraltos, Boy Trebles (unchanged voices), Boy Altos, Boy Tenors, Boy Bases. By using these names the younger boys will not feel that they are singing with the girls, although the Sopranos and Trebles, and the Contraltos and Altos will be using the same part. The music should be arranged for four parts and if one of the parts is missing in any group, the well trained teacher will know how to rearrange the parts so that the musical effect is satisfactory. Parts for the boys must be extremely simple, as they are confronted with two problems, the singing of a new harmony part, and the handling of a new voice which is not yet under full control.

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